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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002568

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: OBASANJO BELIEVES NIGERIA WILL REMAIN CALM OVER AFGHANISTAN

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER, REASON 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (S) SUMMARY: DURING AN OCTOBER 9 MEETING, PRESIDENT OBASANJO, JOINED BY SPECIAL ADVISOR ADOBE OBE, EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT NIGERIA WOULD NOT EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANT DEMONSTRATIONS AS A RESULT OF COALITION STRIKES IN AFGHANISTAN. HOWEVER, HE ADMITTED THAT NIGERIA HAD ISLAMIC RADICALS WHO BEAR WATCHING. IN THIS VEIN, OBASANJO STATED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO REIN IN ZAMFARA STATE GOVERNOR SANI WHO CONTINUED TO BREW A VOLATILE MIX OF RELIGION AND POLITICS IN HIS ECONOMICALLY BACKWARD STATE. COMMENDING NIGERIAN SUPPORT FOR OUR MILITARY ACTION, AMBASSADOR JETER ADVISED OBASANJO THAT NIGERIA NEEDED TO TIGHTEN ITS MONEY LAUNDERING LAWS AS PART OF THE INTERNATIONAL EFFORT TO FINANCIALLY SUFFOCATE THIS TRANSNATIONAL THREAT. WHILE ASKING FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE ON MONEY LAUNDERING, OBASANJO ALSO HINTED THAT NIGERIA COULD MODESTLY INCREASE OIL PRODUCTION, SHOULD PERSIAN GULF PRODUCERS EXPERIENCE DISRUPTIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) INITIALLY FIDGETING AND COMPLAINING OF A COLD, PRESIDENT OBASANJO QUICKLY WARMED AS THE MEETING PROGRESSED. AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF HIS OFFICE TELEVISION BROADCASTING NEWS OF COALITION OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN, OBASANJO PREDICTED THAT NIGERIA WOULD REMAIN CALM IN RESPONSE TO THE MILITARY OPERATIONS. LIKE EVERYWHERE ELSE, THE COUNTRY HAD ITS FRINGE ELEMENTS WHO WOULD TRY TO STOKE THE GENERAL POPULATION; HOWEVER, THIS TINY BUT BOISTEROUS MINORITY WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO STIR THE PEOPLE WITH THEIR SOUR RHETORIC, HE FORECASTED. YET, HE ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR, NIGERIAN SECURITY AGENCIES WERE CLOSELY WATCHING THESE FIREBRANDS, LEST THEY RUN AMOK.

3. (S) GIVING THE SUBJECT A BIT MORE THOUGHT AND NUANCE, OBASANJO CAVEATED THAT THE LONGER COALITION OPERATIONS LASTED, PARTICULARLY IF COUPLED WITH REPORTS OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES OR AN EXPANDED THEATER OF OPERATION, THEN NIGERIA MIGHT EXPERIENCE SOME ANTI-AMERICAN PROTESTS. OBASANJO ADVISED THAT WE MUST RECOGNIZED THAT OIL PRODUCTION IN THE GULF COULD BE AFFECTED SHOULD THE BATTLE AGAINST TERRORISM ESCALATE SIGNIFICANTLY. ALTHOUGH NIGERIA WAS NEAR MAXIMUM CAPACITY, HE SUGGESTED THAT THE COUNTRY COULD PROBABLY INCREASE PRODUCTION MODESTLY -- BY A QUARTER MILLION BARRELS DAILY -- SHOULD THE EMERGENCY ARISE. AMBASSADOR JETER THANKED OBASANJO FOR THE GESTURE, AND SAID THAT HE WOULD CONFIDENTIALLY PASS THE WORD ON TO WASHINGTON.

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4. (C) THE AMBASSADOR THEN NOTED THAT NIGERIA'S MOST IMMEDIATE SECURITY CONCERN WAS ZAMFARA STATE, WHICH SEEMED TENSE FOR PURELY LOCAL REASONS. AGREEING, THE PRESIDENT FORCEFULLY DECLARED, "I HAVE TO DEAL WITH ZAMFARA." HE REMARKED THAT GOVERNOR SANI SEEMED TO HAVE TAKEN LEAVE OF HIS BETTER SENSES. INSTEAD OF GOVERNING TO BETTER HIS CITIZENS' MATERIAL LOT, SANI ERRANTLY MIXED POLITICS AND RELIGION. IF LEFT TO BREW, THIS UNFORTUNATE ALCHEMY COULD SPREAD TO OTHER PARTS OF NIGERIA. THAT NEGATIVE DYNAMIC HAD TO BE STOPPED, OBASANJO DECLARED.

5. (C) HOWEVER, INSTEAD OF FURTHER ESTRANGING SANI, OBASANJO SAID HE WOULD TRY TO REHABILITATE THE ZAMFARA GOVERNOR. AS A START, HE WAS CONVOKING FOURTEEN EMINENT PERSONS, INCLUDING TWO EMIRS, TO ESTABLISH A FACT-FINDING AND RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE. THE COMMITTEE'S OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE WOULD BE TO INVESTIGATE THE CAUSES BEHIND LAST WEEK'S RUPTIONS BETWEEN APP AND PDP ACTIVISTS IN THE STATE. THE REAL REASON, HOWEVER, WAS TO USE THESE RESPECTED PERSONALITIES TO INJECT SOME WISDOM INTO SANI'S CONDUCT THUS MITIGATING HIS INCREASINGLY RADICAL RELIGIOUS POPULISM.

6. (C) A PRINCIPAL CAUSE OF SANI'S POLITICAL DISTEMPER WAS THE GOVERNOR'S "MORTAL FEAR" OF NSA ALIYU MOHAMMED, A NATIVE OF ZAMFARA AND A CLEAR POLITICAL RIVAL. OBASANJO RECALLED A RECENT BRIEF MEETING WHERE THE GOVERNOR SPUTTERED THE NSA'S NAME "AT LEAST 20 TIMES." SPECIAL ADVISOR OBE INTERJECTED

THAT MOHAMMED WAS NOT HELPING MATTERS BECAUSE HE TREATED SANI WITH PALPABLE CONTEMPT. AT THE CORE OF SANI'S WOES, OBASANJO CONFIDED, WAS MALFEASANCE. TO BOLSTER HIS POPULARITY WITH LOCAL CLERICS, SANI HAD DEPLETED THE STATE TREASURY BY GIVING FUNDS TO THE ULAMAS. NOW THAT THE COFFERS WERE BARE, HE HAD NO FUNDS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE STATE, OBASANJO CONTENDED.

17. (C) AMBASSADOR COMMENTED THAT SANI, SEEMINGLY CLUTCHING AT STRAWS, HAD APPROACHED AN EMBASSY OFFICER, ASKING THE EMBASSY TO INTERCEDE WITH NSA MOHAMMED ON HIS BEHALF. A BEMUSED OBASANJO QUIPPED THAT WE SHOULD HAVE A "CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT" WITH SANI. BECOMING MORE SERIOUS, HE ASKED THAT WE MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH SANI IN HOPES THAT COMMUNICATION WITH THE EMBASSY WOULD HAVE A MODERATING EFFECT.

18. (C) TURNING FROM ZAMFARA, OBASANJO STATED THAT HE MET THE KANO, KADUNA AND KATSINA STATE GOVERNORS OCTOBER 9 TO ASSESS THE SECURITY SITUATIONS IN THESE THREE STATES. KANO, WITH ITS TEEMING POPULATION AND LARGE POCKETS OF UNEMPLOYED, IS ALWAYS PROBLEMATIC. PEOPLE IN KANO WANT TO SHOW THEY ARE MORE DEVOUT MUSLIMS THAN THEIR BRETHRENS IN SOKOTO, THE PRESIDENT COMMENTED. FORTUNATELY, THE KANO GOVERNOR WAS GOOD AND THE EMIR OF KANO WAS THE MOST EFFECTIVE TRADITIONAL LEADER IN THE NORTH. THE EMIR WAS A STRONG BULWARK AGAINST FANATICISM, OBASANJO MAINTAINED. AMBASSADOR BROUGHT TO HIS ATTENTION A PARTICULARLY INFLAMMATORY STATEMENT REPORTEDLY MADE BY THE KANO STATE BRANCH OF THE ULAMA COUNCIL. OBASANJO IMMEDIATELY GOT ON THE PHONE TO CALL THE EMIR, BUT UNFORTUNATELY HE WAS NOT THERE.

MONEY LAUNDERING

19. (C) AFTER COMMENDING NIGERIA'S DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT FOR THE ANTI-TERRORISM COALITION, AMBASSADOR JETER STATED THAT TERRORISM'S ABILITY TO FINANCE ITSELF HAD TO BE STOPPED. WE HAVE TO SHUT THE DOOR ON MONEY LAUNDERING IN THIS REGARD. UNFORTUNATELY, NIGERIA LACKED ADEQUATE LEGISLATION AND AN APPROPRIATE BUREAUCRATIC FRAMEWORK TO TACKLE THIS ISSUE, JETER REMARKED. OBASANJO REPLIED THAT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE WAS DRAFTING LEGISLATION CREATING A FINANCIAL CRIMES COMMISSION THAT WOULD ADDRESS THE MONEY LAUNDERING PROBLEM. THE PRESIDENT REQUESTED USG ASSISTANCE IN DRAFTING LEGISLATION AND ESTABLISHING A CORRECT INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK. THE AMBASSADOR REPLIED THAT WE WOULD SEEK TO HELP WHERE POSSIBLE.

MPRI - LET'S TRY IT ONE MORE TIME

11. (C) JETER STATED THAT THE MPRI CONTRACT TO HELP REFORM THE NIGERIAN MILITARY HAD REACHED A CRITICAL JUNCTURE. BOTH SIDES NEEDED TO DECIDE WHETHER THE PROGRAM SHOULD CONTINUE. FROM THE U.S. PERSPECTIVE, THE NIGERIAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP DID NOT APPEAR FULLY COMMITTED TO THE PROGRAM. WITHOUT THEIR SUPPORT, MPRI COULD DO LITTLE, HE STRESSED. CONSEQUENTLY, RETIRED GENERALS VUONO AND SAINT, THE SENIOR MPRI EXECUTIVES, NEEDED "TO SELL" THEIR PROGRAM TO THE NEW MILITARY LEADERSHIP WHEN THE MPRI DUO VISIT NIGERIA LATER THIS WEEK. IF THEY COULD CONVINCE THE SERVICE CHIEFS ABOUT THE PROGRAM'S UTILITY, THEN IT MIGHT BE PRUDENT TO END THE PROGRAM. OBASANJO OBSERVED THAT THE SERVICE CHIEFS HAD GRUMBLED TO HIM THAT THEY HAD NOT SEEN ANY TANGIBLE BENEFITS FROM MPRI THUS FAR. JETER REMINDED THE PRESIDENT THAT MPRI'S MANDATE WAS INSTITUTIONAL REFORM; THUS, TANGIBLE ITEMS LIKE EQUIPMENT OR EVEN TRAINING WERE NEVER IN THE OFFING.

12. (C) COMMENT. SUFFERING FROM A COLD, OBASANJO OTHERWISE SEEMED AS FIT AND LIVELY AS EVER. HE WAS WELL BRIEFED ON SECURITY AND BELIEVED HE HELD MATTERS WELL IN HAND. THE SUPPORT THAT OBASANJO IS GIVING OUR COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS ENCOURAGING. HIS HINT AT INCREASED OIL PRODUCTION, ALBEIT ONLY MODEST, IN THE WAKE OF POSSIBLE PERSIAN GULF DISRUPTIONS IS AN IMPORTANT SYMBOLIC GESTURE. WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO WHAT WE CAN TO MAINTAIN AND FURTHER CULTIVATED OBASANJO'S AND NIGERIA'S SUPPORT IN THE GLOBAL ANTI-TERRORISM EFFORT.

Jeter